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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000542

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DS/IP/EAP; DEA FOR PS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PINS ASEC CASC BM

SUBJECT: DEADLY EXPLOSIONS ROCK RANGOON

REF: RANGOON 489 AND PREVIOUS

¶11. (U) Summary: On the afternoon of Saturday May 7, three nearly simultaneous explosions at two busy shopping centers and an official trade fair in downtown Rangoon reportedly killed and injured dozens. GOB military and police units immediately secured the explosion locations, beefed up their presence at major intersections and key government installations, and closed large shopping centers and markets.

However, overall, Rangoon remained quiet and many retail shops stayed open for the rest of the day.

¶12. (SBU) Post's EAC convened to review developments: all American diplomats are accounted for; there were no known Amcit casualties; and Post will hold a town meeting o/a May 11 to share known information with American citizens. The consular section issued a telephonic warden message advising all Amcits to avoid crowded public places, including shopping areas, malls, and markets. Although the explosions resembled an April 27 bombing in Mandalay, today's events were unusual as they were clearly coordinated and targeted to cause serious loss of life and damage. End Summary.

Three Simultaneous Explosions

¶13. (U) Mid-afternoon on Saturday May 7, three deadly explosions rocked crowded areas at three locations throughout greater Rangoon. Local residents and several Embassy personnel could hear at least two of the explosions, which occurred between approximately 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. local time at two greater downtown locations, the Pazundaung Trade Center in southeast central Rangoon and a grocery store ("City Mart") inside the Dagon Shopping Center near People's Park.

¶14. (U) A third explosion took place at about 3:00 p.m. at a second City Mart grocery store located within a small shopping center at Eight Mile Junction (aka Junction Eight), a busy commercial intersection eight miles north of downtown Rangoon and close to the SPDC's Ministry of Defense compound.

Casualties Reported

¶15. (U) According to local sources and eye-witnesses, each of the three explosions resulted in serious casualties, with reports ranging from several killed and injured at the trade center to several or dozens killed and injured at each of the two grocery stores. A senior police official told Emboff that five individuals were killed at the Junction Eight City Mart and over 40 injured, many of them seriously. Sources at the Yangon General Hospital reported at least ten dead victims and over 150 injured, including several slightly injured foreigners, with overflow patients being directed to other city hospitals. Official state radio acknowledged that three explosions had occurred and reported 11 killed and 162 injured.

¶16. (U) There were no known Amcit casualties at any of the explosion sites, however the two City Mart grocery stores are frequented by many foreign residents, including Amcits. One source told Emboff that several foreigners, possibly Koreans, may have been among the casualties at Junction Eight. The Burmese owner of the City Mart chain told Emboff that many of her employees were among the casualties, "with possibly 20 or 30 killed."

¶17. (U) The Pazundaung Trade Center is currently hosting an official "Thailand Trade Fair," co-sponsored by the Thai and GOB Ministries of Commerce, and the three-story building was crowded on Saturday afternoon with trade fair participants and shoppers. Thai Embassy officials told Emboffs that no Thai citizens or officials were known to be among the casualties at the trade fair. The shopping centers where the other two explosions occurred were also crowded with weekend shoppers.

Security Units Deployed, Rangoon Quiet

¶18. (U) GOB military and police units immediately secured the explosion locations, manned major downtown intersections, and closed shopping centers and central markets. Although Emboffs and Embassy sources witnessed a heavy security presence at the three explosion sites, overall Rangoon was

quiet and many businesses and retail shops remained opened for the rest of the day.

EAC Convenes

19. (SBU) Post's Emergency Action Committee (EAC) convened at 1830 to review information and discuss developments. Post has accounted for all American diplomats and will convene a town meeting o/a May 11 to share information with American citizens. The consular section issued a telephonic warden message advising all Amcits to avoid crowded public places, including shopping areas, malls, and markets.

Comment: Coordinated and Targeted

10. (U) There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the explosions. The GOB, during evening broadcasts on official state radio and television, identified various domestic armed groups and exile organizations as the culprits (but offered no evidence linking the groups to the bombings), including the Karen National Union (KNU), the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), the Karen National Progressive Party (KNPP), and the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).

11. (SBU) The day's events resembled a deadly explosion at a crowded market in Mandalay on April 26, for which the GOB reported two persons killed and 15 injured and blamed an unidentified "group of insurgent destructive elements" (reftel). The multiple Rangoon blasts, however, were highly unusual in that they were so clearly coordinated and targeted to cause serious loss of life and damage. End Comment.
Martinez